THE EMBODIMENT OF DEEDS

(تجسم اعمال)

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The embodiment of deeds, as articulated in the Holy Qur'an and the revered traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), is an indispensable concept within Islam. The Qur'an, through numerous verses, alongside the narrations, asserts that the manifestation of one's actions is indeed a reality. This manifestation of deeds, according to the Qur'an, can be categorized into three distinct types. The first pertains to our earthly existence, relating directly to our ultimate fate, happiness, and misery in this world—essentially, our fortune and misfortune. The concept of the manifestation of deeds in this temporal realm corresponds to the rewards and punishments that are universally acknowledged. Experience has validated this notion for all, and should we encase it within a scholarly framework, we find that our actions, as perceived through reason, the Qur'an, and the traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), are indestructible, notwithstanding their apparent transitory nature.

At present, the words I utter may seem but fleeting air, seemingly ephemeral; the actions I undertake—merely transient gestures—might appear inconsequential. I may sit, wave my hand, hear something, or see something. These are but superficial manifestations. However, beneath that surface, they are not merely transient; they are indeed the embodiment of our deeds. This means that our actions, our words, our behaviors, our listening, and even the fleeting thoughts of our hearts manifest themselves in a manner that is proportionate to their essence. If our actions are commendable, they yield for us a world of eloquence and prosperity; if they are malign, they engender a realm fraught with sorrow, troubles, and afflictions. This is what is termed "retribution" or "the embodiment of deeds" in this world.

The Qur'an addresses this matter in perhaps over a hundred verses, particularly concerning the manifestation of deeds in this life. Among these verses is the one that

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states, “Allah sets forth the parable of a town that was secure and at peace, its provisions coming to it abundantly from every place; yet it denied the favors of Allah, so Allah made it taste the garment of hunger and fear for what they used to do” (Qur'an, Surah An-Nahl, 112). In this verse, the phrase "for what they used to do" is reiterated throughout the Qur'an, signifying that the afflictions of hunger and fear that befell a people once prosperous were of their own making. They themselves transformed their state of comfort into one marked by hunger; they exchanged their inner peace for trepidation.

This denotes a life intertwined with sorrow and anxiety, a life burdened by worries and restlessness—consequences of their actions. The Qur'an illustrates that this once secure town, which was blessed with bountiful provisions, showed ingratitude towards the blessings of Allah, and thus, their misuse of these bounties resulted in hunger. Their own actions, their sins, converted their security into insecurity, their inner tranquility into turmoil.

Furthermore, we find in various verses, including those in Surah Al-Kahf and Surah Al-Baqarah, that the welfare of one's offspring is also contingent upon our deeds. It states, “And let those beware who, if they left behind weak offspring, would fear for them. So let them fear Allah and speak words of appropriate justice” (Qur'an, Surah An-Nisa, 9). Your piety and the restraint of your speech serve as a safeguard for your children's future. If you fear for your children's well-being and wish to secure a prosperous future for them, let them be mindful of Allah and speak justly.

In Surah Al-Kahf, we encounter a remarkable exchange between Prophet Musa and Khidr, where Musa was to attend a special class, a highly specialized lesson. Khidr,

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though lesser in rank, was appointed as the teacher—a divine intermediary. When Khidr damaged a wall, Musa objected, suggesting he could at least have been compensated for his labor. Khidr replied, "This is the parting between me and you" (Qur'an, Surah Al-Kahf, 78), elucidating further that "As for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city, and beneath it was their treasure; their father was righteous, and your Lord intended that they reach maturity and extract their treasure" (Qur'an, Surah Al-Kahf, 82). The inclusion of the phrase "their father was righteous" serves as a parenthetical remark. Its presence is not obligatory for the understanding of the narrative, yet it emphasizes the point—because of the righteousness of their parent, Allah wished for the children to prosper in this world.

Such examples abound in the Qur'an and the traditions, illustrating the notion of retribution and the manifestation of deeds in this world. Our virtuous actions lead to our happiness in this life, while our misdeeds—particularly oppression—result in our suffering. This discourse merits extensive exploration, perhaps to be pursued in future discussions.

The second aspect of the manifestation of deeds, as articulated by our esteemed scholars such as Shaykh al-Saduq and Allameh Majlisi, posits that all our actions, words, and even the fleeting thoughts of our hearts are perceived in their corresponding Barzakh (the intermediary realm) form, remaining with us until the Day of Resurrection. On that day, they shall accompany us, leading us either to paradise, where we shall enjoy heavenly delights, or to hell, where we shall confront the grim realities of our misdeeds. This understanding of manifestation is universally acknowledged by philosophers, narrators, and both Sunni and Shia scholars alike.

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We find ample verses and traditions supporting this understanding, wherein even philosophers derive from the Qur'an and narrations that paradise exists presently; however, it is we who must construct our palaces, companions, and bounties therein. Conversely, hell is also a current reality that we prepare for ourselves.

These utterances, akin to the fangs of a serpent or the sting of a scorpion, manifest as our own words—gossip, slander, falsehoods—that scorch the hearts of others, transforming into serpents and scorpions in the afterlife. As philosophers have articulated, the Qur'an confirms that when the inhabitants of hell are cast into their fate, Allah states, "This is for what your own hands have sent forth" (Qur'an, Surah Al-Imran, 182). You are the architects of your own destiny; what you have prepared, you must face. Conversely, when the righteous enter paradise, the Qur'an informs us that the angels or Allah greet them with, “Peace, a word from a Merciful Lord” (Qur'an, Surah Ya-Sin, 58). Upon entering paradise, they are told, “Eat and drink in comfort for what you sent forth in the past days” (Qur'an, Surah Al-Haaqqa, 24)—the rewards are indeed a reflection of their own prior deeds.

The repeated verses of “This is for what your own hands have sent forth” and “Oh, I wish I had sent forth for my life” resonate throughout the Qur'an. On that Day, man will reflect upon his past actions, lamenting, “Oh, I wish I had prepared for my life.” Yet the Qur'an warns, “And how could he remember when that remembrance will be of no benefit?” Thus, from the Qur'an and narrations, it is derived that the fire of hell is indeed kindled by our own hands; we are the architects of our own inferno, just as we are the architects of our heavenly abodes.

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The Qur'an emphasizes this embodiment of deeds persistently, stating, "On the Day when every soul will find what it has done of good present" (Qur'an, Surah Al-Imran, 30). Each individual shall confront their actions, surrounded by their manifestations. They will wish for an immense distance between themselves and their iniquities, feeling the weight of shame, as narrated, to the point where their perspiration overtakes them. They would rather face hell than the disgrace of their deeds, exclaiming, "Oh, I wish there were a distance as vast as the horizons" (Qur'an, Surah Az-Zukhruf, 38). The Qur'an further cautions, "And Allah warns you of Himself, and Allah is Kind to the servants" (Qur'an, Surah Al-Imran, 30).

This divine warning underscores the reality of the manifestation of deeds, urging us to be vigilant, for our words and actions are indelible. As the Masnavi poignantly states:

"Whatever you sow, you shall reap daily,

Whatever you weave, you shall wear daily."

These are the tenets of the Qur'an and the traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), which draw from the clear teachings of the Qur'an and the authentic narrations of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them).

It is recounted that a noble companion approached the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), expressing his inability to always be in his presence and requesting a guiding principle for his life. The Prophet responded simply, stating, "Whatever you do shall accompany you in the grave; if it is good, it will be with you, and if it is bad,

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it will also be with you. If you seek good companions, if you seek a good confidant, be mindful of your words and actions." Our speech and conduct can either create tribulations for us in the grave or elevate us. This discussion warrants further elaboration, and it is my hope that we may engage in such discourse in due time.

What is universally accepted, however, is that, as noted by the esteemed Muhaddith Qummi in his work "Mamal al-Akhirah," he cites a saying from Shaykh Bahai regarding the Iron Throne of Isfahan, wherein he recounts having visited a hermit. The hermit shared a recent revelation: "Last night, I saw a young affluent man buried here, and soon after, I observed a black dog enter the grave. The young man emerged, while the dog remained." Upon conversing with the young man, he learned that the dog represented his wicked deeds, while he represented the good actions. Ultimately, the dog remained while the young man was freed. Shaykh Bahai concludes that this understanding is a fundamental tenet of Islam, recognizing the manifestation of deeds in this manner.

Thus, we come to the third aspect of the manifestation of deeds, which esteemed scholars like Allameh Majlisi may not have extensively discussed, yet luminaries like Sadr al-Mutahhidin have drawn from the Qur'an to suggest a subtle form of reincarnation. Given that this is a Qur'anic and narrational matter, it is imperative that we engage in discourse on it, setting aside philosophical debates.

Sadr al-Mutahhidin contends that reincarnation is impossible because the return of an action to its potentiality is inherently flawed. The transition of the soul from one body to another is likewise untenable. He suggests that while one may not fully grasp the concept of returning from action to potential, the Qur'an states, "My Lord, send

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me back—so that I may do good in that which I have left behind." But nay, it is merely a word he is saying, and behind them is a barrier until the Day they are resurrected (Qur'an, Surah Al-Mu'minun, 99-100).

This indicates the reality of the Barzakh; when one passes away, they enter this intermediary realm until the Resurrection. However, Sadr al-Mutahhidin introduces a subtle form of reincarnation derived from the Qur'an and narrations, which posits that our actions, words, and especially our vices or virtues profoundly affect our essence. If our actions are corrupt, if vile traits lie dormant within us, they can distort our humanity into a form that aligns with those vices.

Sometimes, a person's identity may regress to that of a donkey, a dog, a pig, or even a fierce panther, as our words, deeds, and especially our vices can reshape our very essence. As Sadr al-Mutahhidin explains, there is a narration, relayed by Allameh Majlisi in "Bihar al-Anwar," suggesting that sometimes this identity becomes more repugnant than any monkey or pig, manifesting as a form more grotesque than any other animal.

Sadr al-Mutahhidin elaborates on this theme, echoing the sentiments expressed in the Masnavi, which begins with the admonition:

"O torn skin of Joseph,

Beware, lest you awaken as a wolf from this heavy slumber."

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Be vigilant, for you may awaken as a predator in this realm and stand among the throngs on the Day of Judgment.

Sadr al-Mutahhidin proceeds by referencing various narrations and verses. One such narration, which I am certain you all have heard, pertains to a companion who, upon completing his Tawaf, sat with Imam al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) and remarked how crowded the sanctuary was. The Imam responded, "How much noise there is, yet how few the true pilgrims. Look through the cracks in my fingers." Upon doing so, he saw creatures—mice, cows, leopards, and rabbits—among the throngs of those calling out, "Labbaik."

This illustrates that our vile traits alter our humanity, rendering us unrecognizable. The one whose character is tainted by vices is not truly human, even when they appear so corporeally. The essence of their being has transformed into something else entirely. Numerous narrations and verses emphasize this theme, urging vigilance regarding the manifestation of deeds. "And there, every soul will be tested for what it has sent forth" (Qur'an, Surah Yunus, 30).

On the Day of Resurrection, the veil will be lifted, and eyes will become sharp. As the Qur'an proclaims, "And We will remove your covering, so your sight today is keen" (Qur'an, Surah Qaf, 22). In that moment, every soul will witness its true self, and others will see us as we truly are. As narrated, some will enter the congregation gleaming like the full moon, radiating the brilliance of their humanity, reflecting the purity of their inherent nature. They will navigate through the ranks until they reach the station of the prophets. "And whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger—those are with the ones upon whom Allah has bestowed favor, from the prophets, the

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steadfast, the martyrs, and the righteous. And excellent are those as companions" (Qur'an, Surah An-Nisa, 69).

Indeed, there exists a realm beyond paradise where one may find themselves in the company of Imam Husayn (peace be upon him), a state undoubtedly superior to any heavenly abode. It is certain that being in the presence of Amir al-Mu'minin (peace be upon him) on the Day of Resurrection, receiving his words of wisdom, is more exalted than any paradise, for such is why paradise seems trivial to them.

In the closing of his "Irsad," Shaykh al-Dilmi narrates a delightful hadith: during the Ascension, Allah addressed the Messenger of Allah, stating that some of my servants on the Day of Resurrection will be immersed in the realm of unity. They will have no dealings with paradise, maidens, or palaces—none whatsoever. I will say to them, "Let the inhabitants of paradise enjoy their pleasures." Your sustenance lies in conversing with Me, in seeing Me. "On that Day, faces will be radiant, gazing at their Lord" (Qur'an, Surah Al-Qiyamah, 22).

What a world that must be! Let the inhabitants of paradise revel in their delights, for your nourishment consists of conversing with Me—your joy lies in our communion. Then, I shall address the Messenger of Allah, saying, "I have my eyes on these servants, and with every glance, I grant them expansive existence." This expansion is not merely an increase in gardens; it signifies an ongoing completion and growth for these souls. While their duties may cease, their journey of completion does not—indeed, it continues, even for the inhabitants of hell. Many of those suffering in hell eventually attain readiness and transition to paradise.

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Thus, the completion of accounts exists for the inhabitants of paradise, as they journey through the stages of proximity to the Divine, a journey that knows no end. The essence of the Almighty is boundless, and thus, their journey is an eternal one. As the Qur'an states, "And whoever seeks the truth will traverse the truth" (Qur'an).

This journey is unending, and the pleasures therein are immense. As recounted in narrations, the maidens of paradise surround them, intoxicated by the love of God, while they are immersed in this divine love. The maidens lament, "We have not been able to capture their hearts, for they are consumed by their love for the Divine."

In conclusion, if we had no other evidence for the third aspect of the manifestation of deeds than this verse, it suffices to caution us against harboring any vile traits within the depths of our being. Should we allow obstinacy, anger, arrogance, or selfishness to take root within us, as warned by the Qur'an, such traits will manifest in the afterlife. The Qur'an states, "On the Day when Allah will resurrect them all, they will swear to Him as they swear to you, thinking they hold a cause. Indeed, they are the liars" (Qur'an, Surah Al-Mujadila, 18).

This signifies that, on the Day of Resurrection, the obstinate will be confronted with their fate. When addressed about the fire of hell, they might swear by Allah, claiming, "Oh God, by Your right, I am a good person." They will insist that the angels have erred, that divine justice is flawed. "They swear to Allah as they swear to you, thinking they hold a cause." The obstinacy that prevails here will carry over to the hereafter, causing them to stand against God Himself. May Allah protect us from such a fate.

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In Surah Al-Mujadila, it states: “On the Day Allah resurrects them all, they will swear to Him as they swear to you, thinking they hold a cause. Indeed, they are the liars.”

This obstinacy can be insidious, leading to the most perilous of consequences. Allameh Majlisi recounts that when the noble Prophet (peace be upon him) entered hell to liberate its inhabitants, a breeze swept through, prompting some of the obstinate denizens to inquire about the commotion. Upon learning that the Messenger was present, they retreated to their cells, shutting themselves away from his sight.

This observation encapsulates the third aspect of the manifestation of deeds. If traits of obstinacy and arrogance reside within an individual, they will resist even the call of the Prophet. In this world, they reject spiritual guidance; in the hereafter, they challenge the Divine.

There are numerous narrations illustrating that, on the Day of Resurrection, they will oppose God, arguing their case. If only they understood the consequences of their obstinacy, many among the condemned would find redemption. May Allah, through the grace of Imam al-Mahdi (may Allah hasten his reappearance), grant us the ability to purify our souls and nurture our spirits.

And may blessings be upon Muhammad and his family.

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